

This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + Refrain from automated querying Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

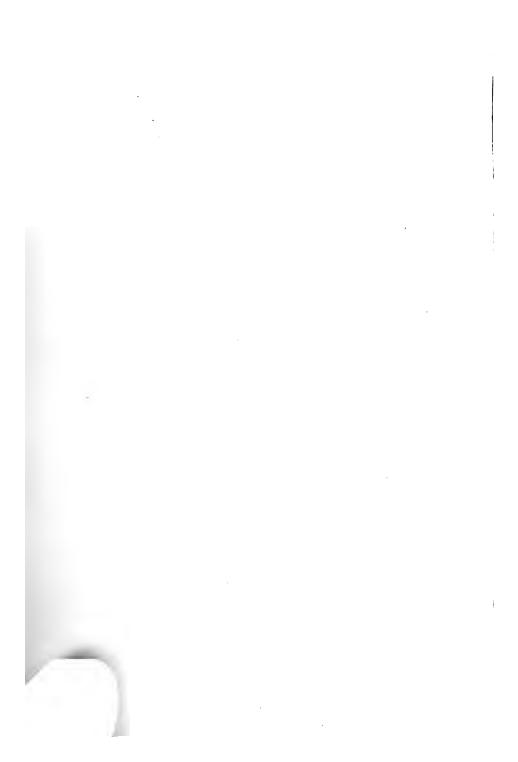
Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at http://books.google.com/





822,8 T5-7j

. .



JEAN

.

JEAN: A Play

IN PROLOGUE AND THREE ACTS

HARRY TIGHE

LONDON
ELLIOT STOCK 62, PATERNOSTER ROW
1901

•

. . .

1

13 hay oghin

PREFACE

THIS play, which deals with the sufferings of a woman and then of her child, Jean, is sent forth into the world to take its chance among the masses of literature published every year. Should it pass unnoticed by the majority of readers, the author trusts it may fall into the hands of some who are sorely tempted, and help them to stand firm; or into the hands of sufferers, to give comfort and trust in a God who rules all things seen or unseen, understandable or unfathomable.

• - [

CHARACTERS

IN THE PROLOGUE.

A Woman (she is prematurely aged; her hair is streaked with grey and drawn away from her big brown eyes, which have a wild expression of intense suffering).

THE ABBÉ (a finely made old man, of reverend mien).

BROTHER ANDRÉ (middle aged, tall and thin, with a slight hesitation in his speech).

A LAY BROTHER.

JEAN (a child).

IN THE PLAY.

THE ABBÉ.

A FRIAR (a fair man with symmetrical features but with an expression of cunning),

BROTHER DOMINIC
BROTHER JOSEPH
BROTHER GEORGE
BROTHER JACQUES
BROTHER PHILIP
JEAN (a youth)

Monks. Dominic is young; Joseph a small man, with a slight lisp.

Several other Monks, mostly well on in years.

The action of the play takes place in the valley of the Rhone, Switzerland.

• •

PROLOGUE.

Scene.—A lonely road by the side of a pine jorest, through which the wind bearing up the coming storm is moaning. Now and again an extra strong gust rises to bend the boughs and blow down a shower of pine needles, which are whirled hither and thither until there is a slight lull and all is silence, save for the faint moaning amid the pines. Far away through an opening a gray stone monastery is seen, people—a woman, poorly clad, thin and ill, with difficulty creeps along, her breathing growing more and more difficult as the road is mounted: a child of some six years old seems weary, and gradually ceases to play and be amused with whirling pine needles. His tired limbs stumble over a fallen branch, but he jumps up without a murmur. A few birds fly over and away to seek shelter from the coming tempest. The time is late autumn, with a keenness in the air; as it is already early winter on the mountain peaks. whereon the eye rests for a moment before wandering away into space.

THE WOMAN.

(Turning to lean against a tree sees the child some way behind.) Come, Jean, if you stay to rest we shall never reach this day's journey's end ere the darkness hides us. Come, haste my son! (She brushes back her wind-tossed hair and closes her eyes with fatigue.)

JEAN.

I want to stay here, ma mère! I'se so tired and hungry. Is there nothing to eat? (He stops as he sees a bird fly overhead.) I wish I was a bird; for God feeds them and forgets little people. (The WOMAN has fallen to a sitting position. JEAN runs to her.) Ma mère! (He pulls her dress, but she does not heed.) I'll say my prayers and ask God to let the holy Virgin Mary take care of me. She knows how, for you told me about her little boy, and in the church He is always in her arms. P'waps she'll have me too.

THE WOMAN.

God forbid you should forsake me, my child —you who know neither sorrow nor disgrace

(Half to herself.) Perchance it were better not to have cared for you in your childish fevers, but to have let you go. (She places one arm round him and plays with his curls.) No, no, you'll grow—grow strong and avenge all your mother's wrongs.

JEAN.

Yes, 'wenge all; what's that?

THE WOMAN (sighs heavily).

Ah! You will know and long for what I do—revenge. Oh!

(She rests her head against the tree. It grows more towards evening.)

JEAN.

I do want something to eat, and so tired. Can't we go again to see the little girl at that house?

THE WOMAN.

No, Jean, we must not return. Onward is our path and we'll not look back over the trodden way. To-night we shall rest in a village beyond the monastery. (She raises JEAN'S head in her hands and places his cheek to hers, re-

maining so for a time. Her voice now grows somewhat hard.) You will see your father before very long, and I shall make him know me and acknowledge you before all—before——

(A shiver runs through her frame as she faints away. JEAN slips from the WOMAN'S grasp and creeps to her head. He has to look very near as it is almost dark. A bell is heard softly calling the monks at the monastery.)

JEAN.

Ma mère, she sleeps. I must watch her—she carried me so far to-day. She is tired. (Looks round.) I wonder will the bears and tigers come to eat us? (A dead bough falls, JEAN screams and hides his face in the WOMAN'S dress.) Mère, wake! The lions—they'll eat us. Why are we here? Wake up—wake! (All is still. He silently sobs. After a time, on looking up he sees a tiny star peeping out, which comforts him.) I'll say my prayers now and sleep too. (He kneels clasping his hands.) Holy Mother, hear me. Make thy little Boy to look on me and mère. Keep all lions and tigers from us: tell them to go the other way. Holy Mother Mary, you had a little Boy and He

used to be hungry, p'waps. So am I. Send the angels to feed me. Make mère sleep and not be frightened. Jesus, take care of me while the sun is away.

(During this prayer a monk is discerned coming up the hill, who by the light of his lantern sees JEAN praying. He, thinking it to be a vision, makes the Christian sign as the child sobs convulsively and falls over the WOMAN'S body.)

Scene II.

Scene.—A small plainly furnished chapel. About thirty monks sit motionless, some holding crucifixes attached to their sides, others have their hands tightly clasped, all with eyes cast on the floor listening in rapt attention to the Abbé François, who stands before the altar finishing an address.

ABBÉ.

Think, brethren, there hung our blessed Lord, scoffed and spat at, the central figure of a moving crowd of angry people. We seem to see them turning one to another as they point scornful fingers at our patient Master in His silent agony. Such a contrast to the many-nationed, vari-coloured multitude shouting their rude jests—nay, worse, their insults. (A tiny pause.) Alas! He seemed forsaken by nearly all His followers, some of whom may have waited on the outskirts of the crowd

fearing, yet longing to enter in and take their stand by Him. But they stood afar off. My brothers, let it not be so with us! (A deep, heavy, half-concealed sigh runs through the chapel.) A disciple the one Jesus loved above all others—stood beneath the cross as that one perfect man looked down. Dare we say to see who stood by? or a tender movement on the disciple's part towards our holy Virgin Mary may have been noted by Him-an attempt, if possible, to alleviate her agony or to show sympathy, that wonderful mutual tenderness that is even ours. My brethren, that disciple was bidden to succour and take the holy woman under his care—away from those who despised her—as the mother of Jesus. Let us take a lesson from it, and do likewise to those who are tossed up on the waves of this world's evil slander. Receive them. take them aside and inwardly say those beautiful words: "Go and sin no more!" Brothers, pray long and earnestly that ye should be ever meek and of a lowly, pure mind, over which ye must exercise control. Pray without ceasing that ye look not only to do great works, but to be content to perform the minute, everyday deeds with the hope of greater, nobler ones to follow. Remember a little service rendered is often the germ which bears the fruit of a large tree later on. (He pauses and looks

round.) Our blessed Saviour on the cross, though deeply feeling His burden of suffering, had thoughts for others. In those terrible moments we see how much He did—how great was His touching sympathy for the thieves crucified on either side of Him. Jesus—His very name means Saviour—pitied them; they roused His sympathy as He prayed to God to forgive them. May God with the same sympathy forgive you—forgive me also, our many sins!

(He turns to the altar, with its shining candles, and rests upon his knees. A sound, as of a gentle wind on a palm-clad shore, is heard as the thirty monks fall upon the stone floor and bow their heads in silent, reverential prayer. After a few minutes of absolute stillness, during which not one is conscious of his surroundings, being filled with holy thoughts, the ABBÉ rises and faces them.)

ABBÉ.

May God grant you peace such as your works deserve. May Jesus grant you that measure of holiness which shall be a just reward for your prayers, and may the blessed Virgin ever intercede for you.



(A low, soft threefold amen is heard, then all is quiet until the tingling of the chapel bell tells them their devotions are at an end. Softly, with no more than a rustling sound, one by one the monks pass out into the darkness, save the ABBÉ, who is praying. A lay brother with the snowflakes fresh upon his russet gown enters, bows, and stands waiting. The bell ceases. The ABBÉ rises, puts out the altar lights, and comes towards the lay brother.)

LAY BROTHER.

Abbé, there waits a woman who would speak to you.

ABBÉ.

Sayst thou a woman? Maybe a traveller.

LAY BROTHER.

Yes, Abbé. As I came up from the village, by the light from my lantern—for the night was already growing—I saw a child kneeling. It seemed a vision, until he fell forward over the body of a woman, whom I thought dead at first, but by chafing her hands I revived her enough to

lean on me while I carried the boy to the gate, where Brother Michel met me.

ABBÉ.

God has answered my prayer: for surely it is some sinner wanting guidance.

LAY BROTHER.

We think she is dying.

ABBÉ.

Haste! Where hast thou placed her, and the child too? She asked for me?

LAY BROTHER.

Yes, Abbé.

ABBÉ.

By name?

LAY BROTHER.

No, for the Abbé.

(They cross themselves with holy water and leave the chapel, which is seen in darkness; save for one burning altar light.)

SCENE III.

SCENE.—A cell in the monastery very sparsely furnished with a trussel bed, over which hangs a large wooden crucifix; a bare table, on which stands a statue of Madonna and Child, with two small vases of artificial flowers, and a tallow candle shedding a ghastly light. At the back of this is a small window looking down the road by the pine wood. It is night, and stormy, the wind howling round the walls with a sound as of wandering souls in distress. On the bed lies the Woman with closed eyes; by her side, with his head on her arm, the boy Jean is fast asleep. A monk stands by the Woman's head.

BROTHER ANDRÉ.

Even the four walls of a monastery do not blot out the vision of the women we knew and-yes, why should I deny it to myself?—loved. The shadow of what was once most dear to us penetrates the sombreness of our cells to give

comfort to our souls. (He looks round and continues in softer tones.) Your face brings it all back to me—reminds me of my mother; for her sake dare I? (He goes to the door, listens, then back to the head of the bed, grasps his crucifix and bends down murmuring.) For my mother—my mother, and the others. (Kisses the WOMAN'S forehead, rises and looks anxiously round.) How sweet! Ah me! we lose much here.

THE WOMAN.

Jean, he is your son — you must, you shall recognise him. Not me, Jean. Don't go away. God help me for my child — my child! (She tries to rise, almost throwing the boy off the bed. BROTHER ANDRÉ catches and holds him. The WOMAN is now sitting up staring.) Who are you? You have my child, my all in the world! Give him to me! (Enter ABBÉ FRANÇOIS. The WOMAN turns to him.) Make him give me my boy! He's mine! For Heaven's sake!

(She holds out both hands eagerly.)

ABBÉ (sternly).

Come, brother.

ANDRÉ.

She almost threw him out of bed, and I saved him. There is no gratitude in women.

ABBÉ (holding up a warning finger).

Stay thy tongue. Lay the child in my arms, and go get thee a large basket or somewhat to place him in. (He takes the child and ANDRÉ leaves the cell. The ABBÉ bends over the WOMAN.) See, I have thy child quite sase. Rest thee, woman.

THE WOMAN.

Rest! Good God!

ARRÉ.

Hush! Speak not that name of names in haste or anger!

THE WOMAN.

There's no rest for me. I've not known any for six years. Ever tossed, ever buffeted since he was born. (She rises on one arm, looking into the child's face with a passion of love and anger.) I've been scorned, spurned by Church and home; a wandering outcast because of him, who is so pure, so good. My son, you were given me by Heaven

out of pity for my sorrow. Yet it was accounted sin.

ABBÉ.

Woman, doubtless you were receiving punishment.

THE WOMAN.

No, it was not then, but afterwards. What matter, I had to gain bread for my child! None believed in me, because in their eyes I had sinned beyond forgiveness. If only some good woman of my own station had held out a friendly hand, it would have saved me. Abbé—for I suppose you are he—why is it when a woman sins her life is damned, while the man goes on in his world beloved, untainted? (The ABBÉ looks down at the child in his arms and is silent.) Is it right, that inequality of justice?

Abbé.

I do not know. It may be his punishment will be severer in the world to come.

THE WOMAN.

Just as in this his transgression is the grosser. Men tempt us and we are weak. (She falls back on the pillow. Outside the snow has ceased to fall. All is quiet until BROTHER ANDRÉ enters with a large basket made into a sort of bed, which he places by the bedside. The ABBÉ lays the child in it, and signs to the monk, who leaves the cell. Again silence. The WOMAN seems thinking hard and moves her lips. Twice she rises to speak, but falls back again.)

ABBÉ.

My sister, I cannot offer you more than sympathy, which makes my heart bleed for you. I knew cases, such as yours seems to be, in the past; and it is we men who later on in life bear the burden of those early terrible sins which our strong, hot blood impels us to commit. I know it! Would you find comfort in confiding in me? (The WOMAN buries her head in her hands.) There is a God above who will one day judge us all, then there will be justice. Crooked paths will be made straight, and down-trodden flowers will rise like those which the heat of the day has made to droop, droop till lost in the grass of the fields, when lo! the gentle evening breeze blows up soft showers, which freshen the withered blossoms and enable them to raise their heads until they stand proudly

among their companions—those very blossoms which we looked on as not worth notice. Have you no belief in God?

THE WOMAN

The unequalness of justice between man and womankind causes us women to believe in nothing.

ABBÉ.

We cannot judge. We must accept with patience what crosses our pathway.

THE WOMAN.

You speak well—shut up here where temptations do not enter!

ABBÉ.

No place is free from the wiles of the tempter. Woman, hast thou aught to tell me? I might almost say for thy child's sake it is thy duty. Shall I stand aside whilst thou communest with thyself? Remember, sister, as thy guilt is no doubt great, thy repentance must likewise be; for it is only those who come in such a spirit gain absolution.

(He turns away and goes to the window. The snow-clouds fly across the sky, showing glimpses of moonshine.)

ABBÉ (thinking).

Some poor down-trodden sister not long for this world! And the child, what of him?

THE WOMAN.

Abbé, Abbé! (He goes to her.) Swear to me you will write every word I speak and give it to my son when he becomes a man. Promise me you will guard and watch him until he is of an age to start alone in the world. No, no, you must not hesitate. You dare not deny the request of a dying woman. If you do I cannot, will not die and leave him alone. I refuse to die.

ABBÉ.

Death is beyond our control.

THE WOMAN.

Abbé, give me something to make me live, for vengeance!

ABBÉ.

Speak not of vengeance! I will do what lies in my power for the child.

THE WOMAN.

Even now I feel the hand of death stretching out for me. Haste, haste, get something to write with. Oh, do haste.

(The ABBÉ goes to a small cupboard in the wall and takes out writing materials, placing them on the table in front of the Madonna, carrying all to the bedside. The Woman lies thinking, with one hand on the child's head. ABBÉ sits on a wooden chair, waiting for the Woman to begin.)

ABBÉ.

Sister, I am ready. (The WOMAN lies perfectly still, her eyes looking towards the window, where the moonshine enters and through which a few stars are seen, both frequently obscured by the scurrying clouds, yet each time there seems a longer interval of light.) Shall we begin ere it is too late?

THE WOMAN.

Aye, ere it is too late. Abbé, I love my son, he knows no one but me; could he not stay with me—to pass together into the unknown? We have been companions in life, why not in death?

ABBÉ.

God's will be done. Pray for him.

THE WOMAN (with earnest fervour).

I have not dared to pray for years, but I taught Jean's innocent lips to make my petitions. Keep him from the world, from the knowledge of evil; let his walks be amid the peacefulness of this monastery. Make him Christlike, so that he may be happy, with that peaceful joy which shows on all your faces. Now write. Oh, don't delay—write, write! (The ABBÉ, at her dictation, takes down word after word for some ten minutes, only stopping to moisten her lips with brandy when her voice seems giving out.) If I thought he'd live to hate me I'd, I'd—God! I can't say much more. My life is going. Surely there will be mercy for me!

ABBÉ.

We read that harlots and sinners, perhaps, enter the kingdom before rich men and women.

THE WOMAN.

I've had my punishment in this world. It was for him, for Jean's bread and butter, it all happened. I could not see him starve!

(She falls back with a groan. The ABBÉ moistens her lips again; she revives and tries hard to speak, but her voice will not rise above a whisper.)

ABBÉ (bending over her).

Where is he now? Do you know?

THE WOMAN.

In Rome. (She murmurs some inaudible words; then, holding the ABBÉ'S arm, pulls herself up, staring wildly at the window.) See, the spirit of death is entering. (The candle burns lower, flickers, and goes out, leaving the moonshine, which throws its beams full on the bed.) For me it is coming. Jean! I can't die and leave you.

(Her voice gradually rises.) Mon Seigneur, if Thou wilt have me, take him too! Save me, Abbé. (Clutching his arm.) For my child's sake save me. I fear death. What have I done? What has my life been? (The ABBÉ holds a crucifix before her eyes. She first stares at it, then, grasping it, places it to her lips.) Through Thee I shall gain entry. I have no fear. God—

(With a shriek that resounds through the cell the Woman falls back dead. Throughout the child has slept with a peaceful smile on his face. By an upward movement of his arm the Abbé throws back his cowl and stands by the dead form.)

END OF PROLOGUE.

ACT I.

Scene.—A corner of a garden full of all sorts of flowers out in their full glory; a balustrade runs along one side, ending at the corner with an Italian-shaped alcove, at the edge of high cliffs, overlooking a small straggling village of some eighty houses surrounding the church, standing out well above the cottages with its green old spire. A stream winds through the village and down the valley, fed by the melting snows of the opposite mountains, clearly seen from here. The alcove looks out to north, east, and west. Down the garden path the dark stone monastery hides all else from view. Through a small door the monks continually enter and leave, while others are busy digging, planting, and attending to the flowers, the warmth of the June evening having moistened their brows. It grows towards the hour of sunset. A youth of twenty enters and walks

down the central pathway, stopping to pluck some great red and gold roses, smiling with singular gentleness at the other monks. After wandering amid the flowers he enters the alcove, sits down and looks out over the glorious panorama of Alpine mountains. the sun dips in the west he notes the white snows gradually reflect the deepening shades: Turning to look down the valley his eye runs along until it rises over the mountains, which seem to bar any exit. A few dark clouds round the horizon have not vet caught the myriad colours of the west, where the sun grows larger, assuming a round shape. dark clouds are now fringed with a pale pink light, which deepens as it overspreads a thin shell-coloured gossamer, which rolls away to allow the full reflected glory to shine forth, The great ball save on a few still dark spots. of light-slowly at first-dips lower until it is lost to view, and the gorgeous colours are gathered in, growing from dark red to orange. then pale pink, last of all to a mother-of-pearl shade which fades to dull gray as the mists rise. In the village below the Angelus rings out and all turn with reverence to make the Christian sign. During the last part of the sunset an old monk, the ABBÉ, has entered the alcove and stood watching the fading light. The youth turns as a hand is laid on his shoulder, his face shining as though reflecting what he has just gazed on; the look of joy is intensified when he sees his companion.

ABBÉ.

Jean, it is always easy to discover thee at this hour. Thou art ever eager to take thy seat where thou canst hear the Angelus, and look westward.

JEAN.

Aye, Abbé.

ABBÉ.

Thou lovest, my son, to let thy thoughts wander out beyond the horizon, across the eternal, unfathomable vastness of space, to heaven, God, and glory.

JEAN.

(Raises the hand holding the roses and lays it upon the ABBE'S, which rests upon his shoulder.)

Aye! It is then I seem beyond myself in a strange, beautiful land surrounded by love.

ARRÉ.

Pure thoughts ever aid thee to raise thyself above this world.

(They both sit down, JEAN, still holding the ABBE'S hand, lays his head on his shoulder.)

JEAN.

Abbé, father! I love also to be here when the sun is rising. To me there is a wonderful symbolism in the morning and evening. The sun's forerunning light pierces the mists of dawn and spreads wider and wider, from cloud to cloud, before the actual rising of the sphere, now appearing amid a rose-pink sea, speaking of love and glory for the newborn day. The symbol there is Jesus Christ rising after the preaching of St. John and the earlier prophets, breaking through the encircling gloom to breathe that gospel of human and Divine love. (A few monks enter and stand listening.) Then after the day's toil, maybe through storm and tempest, there grows a majestic glory in the west, more

menacing, sometimes even awful in its might—not so much suggesting love and patient suffering as an all-powerful judgment. In that I see the omnipotent God, for whom the early-morning Jesus has prepared us, coming at the end of the day to judge the world before the night descends.

ABBÉ.

Jean, thou hast a Christlike nature to conceive such thoughts. Surely God is preparing thee for His ministry.

André.

Nay, Abbé, 'tis not the way to address the boy. Thou wilt have him think too well of himself. Remember to whom you speak.

Abbé.

Hush, brother; is it not good to encourage the young?

PHILIP.

You are right. I speak from a vast experience, which none of you will gainsay.

André.

A stain is a stain, and the vessel should bear its mark humbly. (Touching a small round-faced man who seems to have wrinkled himself with ever-smiling good-nature.) What say you, brother?

JOSEPH.

Well, to judge between your two opinions I would wish to have that judgment aided by outward appearance, and to say truly your lean face and figure are not in your favour.

André.

We cannot help our looks. I was myself deceived by them once. (The monks look up. He raises his eyebrows for a moment while surveying them cynically.) However, that belongs to my past; let it remain so.

(He walks away with the others to their work—except Dominic.)

DOMINIC.

I have heard say he had a sad episode in his life—a love affair with a heartless butterfly who duped him.

ABBÉ (half to himself).

It is strange how troubles of the spirit usually make a man hard, while those of the soul open out the bud of goodness to reveal the sweetness of hidden natures. Jean, why so thoughtful of late? I note you are ever wishing to be alone. At your age it is not natural.

JEAN.

Why did Brother André speak of a soiled vessel?

DOMINIC.

Trust not his words.

JEAN.

But it is not the first time he has cast such epithets at me. I sometimes think I have no right to be here.

DOMINIC.

You have as much as he, perhaps more.

ABBÉ.

Yes, Jean, the right of love. For fourteen long, happy years that love has been growing

within me, and now I never cease to thank God for having so strangely guided you to this place. You have helped me to purge away some worldly taints which seemed to linger clinging to my soul. Your childish innocence has taught me more lessons than a thousand learned books, which, after all, never give the comfort and enjoyment of pure intercourse.

JEAN.

Father, that love you speak of has nurtured and nourished mine until now I feel it beats in full harmony with yours. What would I have become, but for you, when all here wanted to turn me out to be brought up as a village lad? Why was it you prevented that so firmly?

ABBE.

It was the fulfilling of a promise.

JEAN.

A promise?

ABBÉ.

Yes.

Abbé, I have so often begged for some information about my own history—just a little gleam as to who and what I am. (*Turns his head away*.) It's that which saddens me.

ABBÉ.

Trust me; it is all I ask.

JEAN.

I have done so all these years.

(Dominic rises, and is soon seen tying up plants some distance away.)

ABBÉ.

In due time thou wilt know all.

JEAN.

Ah! the spirit of mystery does so much to cause the world to misjudge, more often than not ungenerously. I'm of an age to know, to understand, to judge.

ABBÉ.

Jean, I could not endure to see thy brow overspread with sorrow.

JEAN.

Must we not all learn to bear some cross? You yourself said it often needs trouble to prepare the ground for the seeds God would plant within us.

(He presses the ABBÉ'S hand tighter.)

ABBÉ.

When young we are apt to long to see, to grasp everything. No sooner is that craving satisfied than we cry in our anguish, would we had never learnt!

JEAN.

Still, if I knew but a little I could defend myself.

ABBÉ.

There are some things, if possible, better left unearthed.

Mon père, it has often been my happiness to help you bear the burden of yours or another's sorrow, yet have I never known my own. It must be some terrible tragedy that you keep from me.

Abbé.

If so, 'tis better that I should.

(A soft singing is heard from the village below.)

JEAN.

No, no. It keeps me sleepless at night, and during the day debars my thoughts from going beyond wondering, thinking, wondering what it may be? Why am I alone in the world? For my own sake? For my mother's? Or did she wish me to be kept in ignorance? If so, I understand.

(The roses drop from his hand; some rest between them on the seat, others fall to the ground.)

Abbé.

If the story has some thorn which pricks you?

I can bear much, being older in mind than body. Prove my fears are false. Abbé, my mother was a good woman?

(ABBÉ looks away over the mountains and hesitates.)

ABBÉ.

She was-at one time.

JEAN.

Thank Heaven!

ABBÉ.

And if she had not been?

JEAN.

Then I should hate her! I couldn't help myself. I should feel towards her as to a venomous viper. The very thought sickens me!

ABBÉ.

Be merciful; women are more often sinned against than sinning; their trustful natures are so easily deceived. I know it. I know it!

(Singing dies away into the distance.)

Abbé, your words raise up such a conflict of thoughts that I hardly dare to ask to hear more. I pray you give me my mother's words to read. I entreat you let me see clearly all—everything.

ABBÉ.

(Rises and places a hand on JEAN'S head). Thou hast almost persuaded me.

JEAN.

Yet not quite?

ABBÉ.

Yes, the time is come. I will give thee thy mother's last messages.

JEAN.

(Watches the ABBE go away. Thinks.) It cannot be! I'll not believe I'm tainted by a parent's sin! I'm innocent! It wouldn't be justice. Besides, the ideal of a mother I have built by years of loving meditation shall not be lightly shattered! She was a good woman. I know it. I feel it!

(Looking up calls DOMINIC.)

DOMINIC.

You called?

(Comes to him.)

JEAN.

Can I rely on you to remain my friend and brother through all the storms and trials of life? Suppose—suppose I was learning some one's great sin, and for it I was misjudged, would that part us?

DOMINIC.

Certainly not, Jean.

JEAN.

Thank you from my heart—an anxious heart, friend Dominic. Listen, the Abbé has gone to bring my mother's last words.

DOMINIC.

She died here?

JEAN.

On a journey to Italy.

DOMINIC.

And when you think of her you are sad?

One cannot always be gay. But there is a sadness of joy as well as of sorrow.

DOMINIC.

Was the Abbé angry with you just now?

JEAN.

No, no; that could never be. I love him with all the affection that would otherwise have been spent on parents. (Leaning over the parapet he points to the churchyard below.) The remains of my mother buried there are sacred to me. I reverence them as relics of a dead saint. But that is not love, Dominic.

DOMINIC.

Not as the world understands it, Jean.

JEAN.

I do not know the world. Sometimes a feeling of intense longing to be amidst its throb comes over me.

DOMINIC.

Root it out! Nip the desire in the bud!

Why? Is it right a man should pass through life without doing his duty? Has not every one some work to perform, some atonement to make, some evil to repair?

DOMINIC.

Those things will come into your life in their season, as they do to every one who waits with willing hands.

JEAN.

I feel as if they were coming to me. A weight seems hanging over me—just about to fall. I wonder if—but no——

DOMINIC.

You are too dreamy and fanciful. There is the Abbé returning. I'll leave you, Jean, but shall not be far away; if you need comfort, call me.

(He goes away. The ABBÉ reluctantly walks down the path with some papers in his hand. JEAN rises to meet him.)

JEAN (pointing to papers).

Those are for me?

ABBÉ.

I am still very loth to give them.

JEAN.

No, no—I beg you for them.

ABBÉ (sighing).

Well, so be it. Read them carefully, my son. (Gives papers with one hand, the other being raised in act of blessing.) May grace be granted thee to learn and bear what therein is! (Placing a hand on JEAN'S shoulder.) Be strong and brave, my son—my boy!

(Walking away, he is soon hidden by the garden shrubs. JEAN waits a moment before opening the envelope.)

JEAN.

(Reads, and during the reading his face shows bewilderment, anger, lastly sorrow.) "Your mother may you pity—if possible, forgive. It was years ago—almost as in another life—I was at the convent of St. Elizabeth, in St. Etienne, a schoolgirl about to become a woman, with all the passion of the two natures blending together. For the

saying of Mass Jean de Rossi came often-a priest, young, handsome, with a face like one of Raphael's angels, on which I used to gaze until it turned on me and I would go away happy as one blessed by a holy man. I determined to tell the good old confessor all: with that idea I entered the dim church, over which a storm was brewing from the With a beating heart and quivering lips I told of my love. A low, soft voice demanded the man's name. Ere I had time to fully reply I felt myself seized in a passionate embrace, while words of love were poured into my ears; for Jean had himself taken the confessional that morning. storm now broke with all its vividness of lightning and crash of thunder. Some evil was in it, which entered my soul to dwell for evermore. A sweet voice through the gloom called, 'Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle Yvonne!' My heart stood still, for I recognised the Abbess, who had entered on some Jean whispered in my ear, 'Play holy service. your part'; then, looking up with a smile, said, 'Abbess, you have arrived at an opportune moment; Mademoiselle is frightened by the storm. I caught her just as she was falling." (JEAN looks up and round the garden, then reads again.) "After that we met in the garden, church, cloisters, and at last he persuaded me to go away with him, he promising to forsake his Church, into which his uncle, the Cardinal Maraise, had forced him. We disguised ourselves, lied to the Abbess, and went to a village near by. Mon Dieu! had I only known! So time passed on until the winter came and my sin began to tell upon me. Once more I lied and stole away from the convent to a small house, where my child was born. When my convalescence was nearly over a letter came from him, from Rome, acknowledging his son, saying God would punish him, but he would rather endure that than the anger of his Church. To me those words had in them a graveyard knell, ever ringing in my ears and telling me my happiness was gone." (The chapel bell rings, and the monks, as they pass out, look to JEAN; some go to call him, but are stayed by others who understand. He reads on.) "I lost all belief in man and God alike; my prayers seemed unanswered, and then it was I began to sin deeply. DOMINIC, the last to leave, now passes through the doorway, and JEAN is alone.) "A few months ago. while I sat with Jean on my knee, telling him stories, he fell asleep in my arms. His dreams were troubled, his curly head grew hot, while tears Murmuring drowsily, he dried on his cheeks. said, 'Holy Jesu, she does it for me.' Seigncur seemed to answer, for he spoke again:

'Holy Jesu, you say it is the law that sins of the father touch the children of even the third and fourth generation.' I may have been dreaming myself, I know not; but those words I heard, and in them was a warning. On rising up and laying the child on his bed I determined to end my sinful mode of life-to find Jean's father, or at least to move away to where I was not known." (The paper falls to the ground, and he rises with a half sigh, half groan.) My poor mother! Killed by that man who now lives—perhaps a leader, a teacher in our Church! I, his son, living in this place—a bastard in the eves of all. Oh! to wake to find it but a dream! (He leans over the parapet.) But I will avenge you, mother! my life's blood, if needs be, shall be spent on that task! My creed shall be vengeance! If I fail, may I suffer in my turn! (He falls heavily on the seat and looks out westward, where every vestige of colour has died out of the sky, which is now overcast.) But am I fit to live? I, who was the cause of my mother's disgrace! O God! why are some of us brought into the world to give nothing but pain and sorrow to those we should love and cherish? Why is it? Why?

(He feels himself to be where he knows nothing all seems a seething dark mass of cloud. The world comes to him like the far-off echo of one word, "Revenge—revenge!" Unconsciously he stoops down and picks up a rose, which falls to pieces in his hand; on the stem there remains a small bud, just about to open. Darkness sheds its wing slowly over all; one by one the plants grow less and less distinct, more distorted in shape, until they fade from blackness into nothing. The moon begins to rise eastward as JEAN feels a hand placed in his.)

ABBÉ.

Courage, my son, courage!

JEAN.

Yes, to avenge.

ABBÉ.

My son, surely there is no hatred in thy heart toward thy dead mother?

JEAN.

No-pity. It was for me.

Abbé.

Thank Heaven! I feared that, young and sensitive as thou art, thou mightst, on learning the truth——

JEAN (interrupting passionately).

ABBÉ! I have learnt all the truth! My mother sinned—she was tempted by a greater sinner! She sinned again—it was for my sake! How can I hate, even reproach her? But the man who wronged her and ruined her—through whom I am what I am—what of him? Can I rest until I have reckoned with that man? Abbé, I can stay here no longer; to-morrow I shall start for Rome.

ABBÉ.

For Rome?

JEAN.

Yes, to Rome! To find my father!

(The two sit on into the night.)

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

Three months between Acts I. and II.

Scene.—A large, rather bare room in the monastery.

Two doors lead out of it, one by the side of a window, into the garden. A fire burns in the huge fireplace. The time is late afternoon.

The last glow of the setting sun is seen through the window. André, Joseph, George, Phillp, and Dominic, with some other monks, are discovered grouped round the fire.

The Abbé enters; as he opens the door a joyous sound of bells is heard faintly from the village below.

André.

What mean those bells?

ABBÉ.

They are for the marriage of Robert Charleton's

son. The ringers have been too busy during the day to peal.

PHILIP.

Then he's married at last.

DOMINIC.

Jean will be glad when he hears of it. Old Robert and his son were favourites of his.

André.

So they were. I'd forgotten! But when do you think the boy will return, Abbé?

ABBÉ.

I know not. His mission is a solemn one, and one not easily fulfilled. 'Tis no small matter in the Holy City to find even a priest of our Church. Jean's father, we know, was in Rome some seventeen years ago; as to his whereabouts later there is no reliable information.

Joseph.

It's a bigger task than he bargained for.

PHILIP (to ABBÉ).

Do you think he will be successful?

ABBÉ.

That answer lies in God's hands. We must still wait and trust, and not be impatient for his return. The journey, which he does on foot, is a long, tedious one—

GEORGE.

And dangerous, too, if he attempts the passes much later.

(A lay brother enters.)

LAY BROTHER.

Abbé, in the anteroom there stands a travelling friar begging shelter.

ABBÉ.

Haste! Keep him not longer than is necessary in the cold reception-room. Bring him hither and speedily prepare some supper. [Exit brother.

ANDRÉ.

It's bad weather for foot travelling.

GEORGE.

Yes. God be thanked for this snug shelter. A monk's is a good life after all. Ha, ha!

SOME MONKS.

So say we. Ha, ha!

PHILIP.

I wonder who the stranger is?

André.

Some low-born, begging friar, I suppose, like the one who was here last week.

(The door opens and a tall, fair man enters. He has a face which strikes one by its symmetry, accentuated by a look of cunning in the expression of the eyes and mouth. His long russet-brown robe is much travel-stained and torn.)

FRIAR (in a low, musical tone).

Greeting, brothers.

ABBÉ.

Greeting to thee. Thou must be cold. (Gives him a chair.) Come, warm thyself.

(The FRIAR sits down a little apart from the others, very tired, and remains for a few moments with his hand across his eyes.)

DOMINIC.

He looks weary.

André.

He has not the ways of a wandering friar.

PHILIP.

Did you note how he spoke to the Abbé?

André.

I did. As an equal.

JOSEPH.

Yes! A friar. What impertinence!

(The friar moves his hand away from his eyes and rests his chin in it.)

FRIAR (to ABBÉ).

I have walked since early dawn, and if you will shelter me for the night I shall push on to Geneva to-morrow.

ANDRÉ.

Thou comest from a far-off monastery?

FRIAR (turning his head, answers hesitatingly).

Yes, yes. That is, I am from Rome, and have authority to give you the blessing of the Holy Father.

Monks.

From Rome?

ABBÉ.

Rome? (The FRIAR assents. A pause.) I have heard of the poverty in that city—so famous, yet so infamous!

FRIAR.

Indeed!

DOMINIC.

Is it so?

FRIAR.

I suppose there must be some seed to germinate the report. It seems to me a spirit of unrest which pervades all nations, all classes—more particularly the poor, whom one would think had quite enough to occupy their time in other ways.

ABBÉ.

Can you wonder they cry out, when they feel the poverty and wretchedness of life, burdening and bearing them down to the depths of despair? They work from dawn to sunset and never get nearer the time when they can rest from the gnawing thought of how to feed their children—their loved ones. They have no beauty in their surroundings to elevate them or take them out of themselves. Then it is they look and see others, who are no more precious in God's eyes, wasting their lives in freedom and luxury. It is no wonder, to me, the voice of sorrow should start from the lips of the poor.

FRIAR.

Despite my garb, Abbé, I am a prince of the Church, and I tell you the people cry out as paid mourners at an Eastern funeral.

ARRÉ.

You say you are a prince of the Church. May we ask your name?

FRIAR.

I'm not of the low-born caste you judge me to belong to——

ANDRÉ (aside to PHILIP).

Ah! I thought not.

FRIAR.

I am the Cardinal of St. Sulpice at Rome.

Abbé.

It is an honour to have such an illustrious man in our midst. Thy fame, and stray reports of thy great works have reached even here. They say thy preaching savours of the apostles.

FRIAR.

(A smile of satisfaction overspreading his face.) It is true when one raises oneself above mediocrity one's fame goes abroad. (Slightly raising one hand to tap the arm of his chair.) But humbleness, humbleness.

(A lay brother enters and stands holding the door open.)

ABBÉ.

Monsignor, supper is prepared; such as it is,

will you honour us by partaking of it? (FRIAR rises.) Dominic, will you show the way? (The FRIAR, DOMINIC, and a few monks leave the room. ABBÉ goes to ANDRÉ.) Hast thou noted our guest's face? 'Tis not unfamiliar; and that easy, dignified manner which belongs to a court. He is indeed worthy to be a prince of the Church!

ANDRÉ.

I did observe him.

Abbé.

But who does he bring to your mind?

André.

Have you forgotten Jean's face and mien?

ABBÉ.

Nay. (Thinks.) Yes, I see it. The likeness is to him. The calm manner, the kindly courtesy——(A brother enters, running, out of breath.) Ho, ho! Jacques! Why so excited?

JACQUES.

Abbé! He's coming; he's—he's quite near. I

saw him by the road bordered with the pines, and thought it was he, but was sure when he stopped just beyond the cross-road to look at the sunset, then again by the old tree.

ABRÉ.

Who? Jean?

JACQUES.

Yes, yes, Abbé. It's he.

ABBÉ.

Art thou sure?

JACQUES.

I recognised him surer than my own father.

ABBÉ (turns to others).

Come, let us go and welcome our brother, my son, our wandering one home again.

(Enter JEAN, looking thin and ill.)

JEAN.

Nay, Abbé, I'll spare thee that; for I am here.

(They embrace. The others close round; he shakes hands, occasionally giving one a warmer greeting than another.)

André.

Hast thou seen the Holy Father?

JEAN.

We have but one holy father, who is God.

André.

Umph!

JOSEPH.

And is Rome a great place?

GEORGE.

Did you have many adventures?

PHILIP.

You saw St. Peter's and all the architectural wonders of the city?

JOSEPH (who has a weak, piping voice). I trust you have not been ill on the road?

ABBÉ.

Yes, my son, thou lookest not well!

Not so ill as to need a physician.

(Enter DOMINIC.)

DOMINIC.

Where is he?

IEAN

(Comes forward as others make way for him.) Here, Dominic, here.

DOMINIC (holding both JEAN'S hands).

A thousand welcomes back. We have missed you sorely, and never dared to hope to see you as soon as this. (Looks at him.) It is true, then, that Rome is not a healthy place. You want a little of our Swiss air to restore you.

(He lets go both hands.)

ABRÉ

Stayed you at St. Peter's monastery?

JEAN.

No. I stayed in the poor quarter of Rome, amid my suffering brethren, and did not even

see the Vatican. Abbé, my visit here now is but to say goodbye.

(He stops, as if recollecting himself.)

SOME MONKS.

Goodbye?

OTHER MONKS.

You are leaving us again?

JEAN.

Yes, after I have seen my father, whom I hope to meet here.

ABBÉ.

Your father here? I do not follow.

JEAN.

Yes, my father. However, I shall explain later.

Abbé.

But you will not leave us again, Jean?

JEAN.

Abbé, I'm sorry to go away from you all—from my childhood's associations, from everything that I now hold most dear. Truly it will be a

burying of my life, and what I go to will be a resurrection.

ABBÉ.

Why need you go?

JEAN.

When our conscience calls we must obey its promptings.

ANDRÉ (with a slight sneer).

You will feel better in a day or so, Jean.

GEORGE.

You are dazzled by the brightness of the outside world.

JOSEPH.

Or have you fallen into the hands of a woman, and wish to desert the Church for the nagging of a wife? Fie on thee, fie!

(There is a general laugh. JEAN'S face reddens as he bites his lips to keep his tongue in check.)

ABBÉ.

I must admonish you, brothers. It is not

seemly so to jest. Maybe there is some explanation of what seems strange to us.

(He looks inquiringly to JEAN.)

JEAN (with great sadness).

It's not a long story, nor one I wished to tell-at least not to-day nor to-morrow, for I wanted to be among you all, a brother among brethren, as I used to be. I can't stay here! (They all evince great interest and crowd nearer. JEAN rises and, brushing both hands over his head, cries in an agony.) O God! I feel this weight is more than I can bear. My mother's words. ring in my ears like a reproach. I have tried to find him. (Walking up and down.) But search for him I must, in every corner of the globe, if necessary. My mother's name shall be placed in a pure light. To think of her suffering all those years; with what soul-torturing thoughts? Oh, that I had been stillborn, or died before I learnt my shame! Why should I have lived for this? Why do I live? If only I could see him, my father; it is all I ask.

Abbé.

(Going and laying a hand on him.) My boy,

my foster son, your ill fortune is not so sad as to bear you so completely away.

JEAN.

No one's history was ever sadder.

ABBÉ.

No sorrow seems ever to equal that which we ourselves are undergoing; but let our eyes wander round, Jean, and we shall discover sterner tragedies.

JEAN.

Maybe! And I'd rest if only I could see the generator of all my misery and shame.

ANDRÉ.

Have you no clue as to his present whereabouts?

JEAN.

Very little.

ABBÉ.

Explain all you know, and we may help you.

JEAN.

When I got to Rome and sought out my

1311117

father's abode, I learnt he had set forth on a journey through Switzerland, passing en route over the St. Gothard, thence down the Rhone valley, which caused me to hastily retrace my steps with the burning fear that he might pass by this monastery without my seeing him—I should come to find him gone. (The monks look at each other; JEAN notes it and eagerly asks ABBÉ.) You all look as if something had happened. Has he—has my true father been here?

André.

Who is he?

ABBÉ.

We know not his name, so cannot say.

JEAN.

I was named after him. Jean de Rossi, Cardinal----

(Door opens and the FRIAR enters rather noisily. He sees JEAN, starts, and comes slowly forward. The monks make a way for him towards JEAN. The ABBÉ quickly looks at each and speaks in a deliberate tone.)

JEAN

ABBÉ.

Cardinal of St. Sulpice, Jean de Rossi.

FRIAR.

The same.

JEAN.

My father! my father! At last God lets us meet.

(The FRIAR hesitates before answering coldly.)

FRIAR.

What do you mean, boy? Some delusion is working in your brain. I know you not.

JEAN.

You speak the truth; you do not know me. Why?——

FRIAR (interrupts him nervously).

You are no doubt thinking of the relationship which the Church gives us to each other.

JEAN.

No. You are my earthly father, I your son.

FRIAR.

(Livid, trembling with fear, though speaking calmly.) Not yet, my brother; at present I am only a cardinal.

JEAN (with a sneer).

A cardinal! (Growing more angry as he proceeds.) Let there be no more lies. You are my earthly father, the deserter of my mother.

FRIAR.

(Looking round at the other monks.) Hush! You must not be impressed by your own imaginations. (At a sign from the ABBÉ the monks leave the room by the door into the garden, leaving it open. There is silence until the last one has left the room. Looking from JEAN to the ABBÉ the FRIAR continues.) You mistake me. The quiet régime of this place has affected you. My boy, we priests do not marry, so your claim to sonship has no foundation. I tell you you are mistaken.

JEAN.

(Going up to him.) I wish I was. Were you not at St. Etienne some twenty years ago, and from the convent there did you not abduct a

good, pure girl? Then in a hellish way you left her, cast her away, when, contaminated by your touch, a dark spot appeared which, like the contact of a hand on a camellia, spread over the whole flower, until strangers spurned and kicked it aside. (The FRIAR slowly retreats, followed step by step by JEAN.) All this I learnt only some three months ago. And my mother's last command, which she gave before she died in this monastery, was that I should pursue the search she herself had undertaken when death stole her away, and find you, so as to purify her name. With that purpose I left here and sought you in Rome. There the facts I learnt of your being a nephew of the famous Cardinal Maraise, and the date of your first joining him in Rome tallied with my mother's story. covered your church, your house, where I learnt you had started on a tour through Switzerland. Now are you the man I think you are? need not answer, for I see it in your face-your countenance betrays you.

FRIAR.

(Trembling as he leans against the wall.) Stay! stay! you lie!

JEAN.

Lie! Talk not to me of lying; your whole

life is a personification of it. (Raising his hand.) I could strike you—kill you!

ARRÉ.

Jean! be calm.

FRIAR.

In God's name---

JEAN.

Those are words for pure lips. Confess you are my father. Heaven knows there's no credit to me! (He has also become livid. The firelight plays on the two faces as the night is fast coming on. Now and again a log cracks, to fall with a shower of sparks.) Speak! Before God swear the truth, ere you perjure your soul past redemption. Am I your son or not?

FRIAR.

(Closes his eyes, then opens them, whispering.) You are.

JEAN.

(Sighs heavily and retreats.) Why did you not acknowledge me sooner?

FRIAR.

I was afraid.

(They both advance towards the fire, where the ABBÉ is seated in a carved armchair.)

JEAN.

Coward! Have you any reason to give for being such a fiend as to ruin my mother? Have you no heart, that you could leave a woman to suffer for your sins? Her mind and actions were as pure as a crystal spring, which you polluted. You call yourself a man, and do a dastardly deed like that! When I think of it I hate you. I've hated you for the last three months—ever since my mother's confession came into my hands. I've longed for this meeting, I've prayed for the means of revenge.

(The two stand breathing heavily.)

FRIAR.

I am your father. (Taking JEAN'S hand.) You can't do that!

JEAN.

I am my mother's avenger. By Heavens! she shall have some reparation. (Freeing his hand roughly.) Besides, there is myself. Am I not

branded by your sin? Must I bear my lifelong shame for nothing?

FRIAR.

(Interrupts by falling on his knee.) Forgive me! forgive me! I have had my punishment. I've given money to the poor, made pilgrimages. I'm doing penance now by travelling as a friar.

JEAN (sneeringly).

A means of satisfying your conscience, at the same time adding to your glory. The world says you are so pious. Get up from the floor, hypocrite!

FRIAR (rising).

Jean! Jean! my son! forgive me, pity me. I have never been free from the thought of my sin. Ambition was my curse. By degrees it overswamped every other thought; I became its slave!

JEAN.

And my mother and myself had to suffer for it!

FRIAR.

Have you no pity?

JEAN.

Not for you.

FRIAR.

Think of yourself in my position before judging from the standpoint of the non-tempted. When once I had entered upon my life with the cardinal I could not go back to face the disgrace of disclosing my true nature. Oh, Jean! I have ever longed for my wife, for you, with the craving of a man cast away on a desert island for civilisation.

JEAN.

Yet you never sought me, and when by chance you found me, would deny me.

FRIAR.

I feared to do otherwise before all these monks.

(FRIAR begins to pace the room.)

JEAN.

I despise such weakness.

FRIAR.

You were my son just born. I---

JEAN (interrupts).

I have no pity for you. Pity, remember, is

an attribute of love; and as love towards you is nowhere in my nature, there can be no pity.

FRIAR.

Your teaching has been to foster it.

JEAN.

The more worldly side of our nature comes out at times. Let me see!

(He turns to the ABBÉ.)

FRIAR (aside).

Now is my chance for freedom. I dare not undergo a disclosure. How can I escape? (Looks round.) Where does this door lead to? Into the garden; it will suffice.

[Exit noiselessly.

ABBÉ.

Leave the punishment to Providence.

JEAN.

That is all—— (Turns to find they are alone.) What, not here? But he'll not escape me

now I have my hands on him. Where can he have gone to? Into the garden? I'll follow——

(The ABBÉ rises hastily and stays JEAN by placing a hand on his shoulder.)

ABBÉ.

Forgiveness, my son, is sweeter than retaliation; it leaves no bitter taste which grows like a nauseous-smelling plant.

JEAN.

I know; but that man made me suffer; he has taught me the pain of sorrow and the shame of disgrace. Why should he not be tortured too?

ABBÉ.

Would your Master and Saviour have you return evil for evil? (They walk together to the door and stand looking out.) We cannot look into your father's soul and see what he is suffering. He——

JEAN (clutching the ABBÉ'S hand).

Look! he is going towards that door from which the steps have long since been moved.

He's running to it. Unless he knows the perilous path, it means a fall of a hundred feet or more. (Shouting.) Stop, father, stop! Is there no one in the garden? Don't go to that door. Father! father!

(Some monks enter the room. JEAN seems too paralysed to move, and merely points. A pause.)

André.

If he goes by that door it's certain death. He's opening it.

JEAN.

Stop him, stop him; or is it too late?

ABBÉ.

He has passed through.

(JEAN staggers and holds on to the door as he stares into the dim light of the outside world.)

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

Scene same as previous one. Dawn. Jean sits with his head on his hands gazing into the crackling flames. The Abbé stands by him.

ABBÉ.

Jean, my son, thou art a man now, and this sorrow under which thou staggerest is to prove thy manhood. Ever as we get older we see that life can be nothing more than a great school with its many lessons to be learnt—some so hard as to almost bear us down into a stream of despair. But we must not be swept away. If it is that thy father is killed, remember it is from those sorrows which stretch right down into our most secret parts we derive most benefit.

JEAN.

What have I done that it should come to me?

ABBÉ.

Thou art not the only one suffering. My whole heart sympathises with thee. (He kneels with both his arms on JEAN'S knees.) It hurts me to feel there are brambles growing to part us.

JEAN (does not look at him).

Nay, Abbé, I love you as ever I did.

· Abbé.

Show it by proving thyself strong beneath this cross.

JEAN.

I will try, Abbé, but you cannot wonder at my distress. I was indirectly the cause of a mother's, and now, perhaps, of a father's, death! Oh, it is indeed a grievous burden to bear!

Abbé.

Courage, my son, courage. Thou knowest not that thy father is dead: they still search for him by the light of lanterns: there is hope yet.

JEAN.

But this suspense is torture. If they find him a mangled corpse?

ABBÉ.

See the dawn comes quickly to pierce the encircling gloom and breath a breath of love and promise of glory for the coming day.

JEAN (smiles).

I hope I'll prove those words of mine true. Shall I ever be able to pierce my clouds?

ABBÉ.

Time will smooth over much.

JEAN.

Smooth over, but not blot out. I feel I cannot stay here. I must get out into the turmoils of life, there to forget, if only for a moment. Otherwise I shall go mad. To kill father, mother. Oh! Oh!

ABBÉ.

Would it not help you to be with us? We love you,

JEAN.

I must get away to another place, other scenes; everything here reminds—terrifies me with the memory of what has happened. If only I had been more forgiving! I did not mean to act harshly towards my father last night. Then the horror of seeing him open that door—I picture the body turning and twisting in the air. Oh, it is agonising!

(Some monks enter. JEAN looks up, opens his mouth as if to speak, but closes it without a word.)

ABBÉ.

Have they found the body?

MONK.

Not when we left them.

JEAN (impatiently turning aside).

Is there, then, a chance?

ABBÉ.

Maybe.

JEAN (to monks).

Are the others coming? (They assent with their heads.) Abbé, I did not tell you that in my sorrow

last night I determined to call in all the brothers and tell them the story which my—the arrival of the friar interrupted. They are coming now.

ABBÉ.

We shall all wish to hear it, but not now—to-morrow, next day, next week.

(Enter more monks.)

JEAN.

No, I feel I can go through it; later on when I have time to think I may not be so willing to act. (*Placing a hand on the* ABBÉ.) You will stand by me? For I expect much opposition.

ARRÉ.

Need you ask?

(JEAN goes aside to the window, listens, and looks out into the early morning.)

ANDRÉ.

I did not think his troubles would have made such an impress on him.

ABBÉ.

It is impossible to fathom the natures of even those who are nearest and oftenest with us without some terrible upheaval, such as he has had. Poor boy!

DOMINIC.

Let us show him all the love we can.

Monks.

Aye, we will.

JEAN.

(Standing by the window.) Abbé, my brothers, you all know what these last months have been to me—especially the last climax. Alone in my suffering I made up my mind to speak to you all, and after what has so recently transpired it is a duty. To be brief—these words will be, as I told you, words of farewell.

André.

But surely you will stay with us now?

PHILIP.

And become one of us?

DOMINIC.

Yes, Jean!

JEAN.

Listen to my story; maybe then you will not

JEAN 79

reiterate your invitation—no, not when you know all.

MONKS.

Yes, yes.

DOMINIC.

We love you.

JEAN.

(Hesitates a moment, listens by the window then turns and begins). On my way to Rome I was thrown into the companionship of a man, old in years, who lived and had lived in and among the poor. That attracted me, for I knew so little of the struggles and coarser scenes in life. On learning we were both bound for the same destination he asked me to stay with him. I did, in a corner of the city you would have despised entering, but where he was surrounded with such a love from the weak and suffering, as any of you would have cause to envy: they sharing his food, he their trials. After showing me everything he turned and said, "What do you do away in your monastery hedged in with stone walls that allow no sound of the true cry of human suffering to come to your ears? What do you know of it? It is impossible to be akin to things we know not! For once you

have heard it, it would pierce your heart and ever cry in your ears. Love—that wonderful mystery -is the goad which urges man, showing him what to do, where to go; and in a place such as you inhabit it does not, cannot enter in its true, nobler sense." (JEAN turns to a few monks who enter.) Has the body been found? (They shake their He sighs.) "What can you," he said, heads. "intend to do with your long prayers, your ceremonies, crosses, vestments, incense, flowers-all costing money that would help to feed starving people at your doors? Oh, you call yourselves followers of the Son of man who hath no place to lay His tired head. Come you out here to us, help to soften the cry of brotherhood for brotherhood."

ANDRÉ.

He was a fanatic.

ABBÉ.

They called Jesus a fanatic.

JEAN.

I pondered those words, yet dared not move in the matter until a voice whispered, "Your inmost thought is self—root it out! It was the voice of the spirit whose guiding hand led me to Rome, there to envy my friend his work among those who loved and respected him. The woman who had lived in sin, as well as the rescued innocent child, were there waiting by his side for trustful guidance. He was one with them, suffering their hardships, loving with their love, understanding how to help them. (He listens by the window a moment.) Abbé, in our youth is it not God's will that we should work, then, having set sail for the final port, to rest and wait for our time to pass into the shore beyond the veil?

ABBÉ.

Our youth and manhood should be a gathering of memories which will help to soften and while away the hours of old age. If they are pure, happy incidents we store, so likewise shall be our later time. Let those of us who have yet many years to traverse be careful lest evil be impressed on our minds with indelible ink, a record that shall torture us, and one beyond our power to erase. It should be a happy prospect in early years to consider we shall dwell during the quiet, lonely hours of old age in a world of sweet memory, and it should be a delight to build it as a house we shall some day inhabit.

PHILIP.

Why do we not realise that in time to prevent our baser parts from impressing too much?

ABBÉ.

Alas! Most of us learn too late!

JEAN.

I, at least, am determined. I will go forth to make my store among the rejected of society; for I am one of them—my mother was another.

ABBÉ.

Maybe thou art right, Jean. Still I'll mourn thee almost as one dead; for once thou leavest here I'll never see thee again.

(Enter two monks. JEAN looks up inquiringly.)

MONKS.

No, no, not yet. They still search.

JEAN.

But they must soon be successful in the daylight. (To ABBÉ.) When I do go out it will be only as a layman, to do what lies in my power for all—even those whom we call heretics. What right has any one to usurp the use of such a term against another?

André.

'Tis for those who deny our Church.

JEAN.

Do we not deny theirs?

André.

They can come to us.

JEAN.

Cannot we both meet on common ground? We both believe in Jesus, in God, in the resurrection, and the necessity of leading good lives.

ABBÉ.

We do.

JEAN.

It is about ceremonies we quarrel, things to be decided only by our own conscience. Having one fundamental truth, let us work together in good feeling, if not in unison.

ANDRÉ.

You may have been to Rome; but, remember, it is not seemly to come back and preach to us, your seniors.

FIRST BROTHER.

Why should we listen?

SECOND BROTHER.

He is, himself, almost a fanatic.

ANDRÉ.

Let us go and pray for him. (To JEAN, who winces under the thrust.) Take a lesson from thy father's career. We'll petition that his blood be sucked out of thee.

[Exit André with some other monks.

JEAN.

I'm sorry I said so much. But why should I fear to show myself in my own true light,

to be seen as I really am? (More monks leave, shrugging their shoulders and talking among themselves.) I see I am being deserted. Will you now have me stay with you? (Some more go.) Dominic, you were one of my friends. (He leaves without a sign.) I knew it would be so! (Grows excited.) I felt it! These men profess themselves Christians. Look at them—look, look, one not more than a few months ago promised me his friendship for life, no matter through what trials we passed. (Speaking more softly, JEAN turns to the ABBÉ.) You too are angry?

Abbé.

Nay! nay! I'm only sorry for myself. I would not have thee pass out of my life—that is all. 'Tis not much for you, but I shall feel it very keenly.

JEAN.

I must work, I must use the youthful sap within me to make my impress on the world, may be but a slight one—nevertheless a fulfilling of the law of contact which cannot be broken. These, Abbé, are perhaps ideals; but it is well to have something in view to strive for, if we do not reach it we are at least nearer to better things than if we had never formed a goal. Are you sad because I spoke so strongly?

ABBÉ.

No.

JEAN.

When our minds are full of a topic it cannot be secreted. Think what an impression it made on me, one bred beyond the sight of poverty—such as is seen in Italian cities—a dirty, squalid, begging mass! (ABBÉ drops his head. The last of the monks leave.) Don't give way, Abbé. Life is full of sacrifices, of givings up. I could not stay here to be pointed to as a bastard who killed his father.

ABBÉ.

We'll forget that.

JEAN.

It can never be obliterated from my mind, nor from yours, Abbé.

ABBÉ.

The loss of friends is irreparable.

JEAN.

We can be together in spirit.

ABBÉ.

'Tis easier to be in spirit with the dead than the absent living. We must have a knowledge, or a conception of the surroundings of those with whom we would wish to be; the dead we can picture at peace, but for those who leave us in this life we know not whether they are in want, prosperity, trouble or joy.

JEAN.

We can ever hope for the best. Now that my mother and father have both passed tragically away in this place, I feel it better to go far from the whole story and start afresh with some work—an atonement for all my evil thoughts, my hatred of life, of people. I no longer wish to die, as I did; it was cowardly to conceive such an idea—to wish to shirk what God has given me to do, to bear, as He did, the cross. (Opening the garden door he waits until a clock finishes striking six.) Abbé, out in the world one can breathe with freedom, and be happy in the doing of some good

deed—something for another. Come, Abbé, let us go.

(As they move, the other door opens and a lay brother enters.)

BROTHER.

Abbé, stay.

(He points to the door through which he has just entered.)

ABBÉ.

Jean!

(Dominic, showing traces of tears, enters with four brothers, carrying a body on a stretcher, covered over with a white sheet.)

JEAN (in a hoarse whisper).

My father! They have found him. (He goes alone to the corpse and kneels. The four brothers leave the room. DOMINIC gives the ABBÉ a bloodstained paper.) Father, forgive my evil, revengeful thoughts. Now indeed do I realise judgment belongs not to man.

ABBE (comes forward).

Jean, this paper was found by his side.

JEAN (takes it, reads, then looks up).

Abbé, Abbé, it is the proof of my mother's marriage: see, see! it is the record itself!

ABBÉ.

Not so?

JEAN.

Yes, look, look.

ABBÉ.

'Tis strange thy mother did not mention it. But now I do remember some inarticulate words I could not hear.

JEAN.

It is what she would have told you! And it would have saved much. (He rises to his feet at the back of the corpse, the ABBÉ by his side.) Thank Heaven I was conceived in wedlock. (Lifting a corner of the covering he starts back in horror.) My father, forgive me—forgive me. (Drops the sheet.) My mother's name is clear and pure now!

ABBÉ.

Yes. (Taking his hand.) And you will now stay with us?

JEAN.

No. A voice from the world calls me—I must obey.

(DOMINIC lays a hand gently on JEAN'S shoulder as the sun rises over the land and casts its beams into the room.)

END OF ACT III.

EPILOGUE.

Some years after Jean had gone out into the world a funeral procession came out from a very poor quarter of Rome, one that had been avoided for some time on account of small-pox raging in its midst. A man, in spite of warning, had gone in among the people to try what he could do to alleviate their sufferings by working night and day; until falling a victim to the worst form of the disease, he suffered, and died.

The body was followed as far as the barriers by weeping crowds, who stood watching the mortal remains of their friend and helper borne away; unfollowed, for he was unknown outside his sphere of work.

Some women passed the night in prayers for him, while men stood together in groups discussing him. One girl, beautiful in the true Roman fashion,